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Story:Telling

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Storytellers communicate through voice and gesture, directness and intimacy. Each has a style and individuality expressed through the art of telling. Artists communicate with the audience in similar ways. Stories can be told through image and text, through the intimacy of the hand held book, the imprint of the type, and the compositions that lead the eye over the space of the page. Whether the tales are personal memories or fictional fantasies, artists invite the reader/viewer to share in the experience of each story.

STORY:TELLING honors and challenges the traditions of story telling. Just as writers have explored and revamped the structure of conventional narrative, so too have artists who work in the book format. Claire Owen responds to a story heard in her childhood about St. Francis in a traditional letterpress book entitled *Honey from the Mouth of a Wolf*. In a dual narrative, she recounts events from Francis's life, but also interjects the poetic voice of a wolf that he saved. Departing from tradition, Jim Machacek literally examines the time-based structure of stories and books in *Time Card Book*. A series of computer printed and collaged cards are filed in a metal time card rack. Akin to the collage technique, the pages follow a twenty-year time-line of a relationship with bits and pieces of remembered events and conversation.

As one of the first forms of literary communication, oral tradition was a way to report the day's events, preserve history, and disseminate beliefs. Creation myths continue to enrich our present day lives, as in Michael Fallon's letterpress book, *How Humans Came to Have Fire*. Wood block prints on pulp-painted paper illustrate a story and essay by Doris Adams and Kate Taluga, two Creek storytellers. Long before printing, storytellers used imagery as mnemonic devices to spur on the story. Petroglyphs capture events from thousands of years ago. They still enable the contemporary viewer to glimpse the daily life of societies now gone. Mary Maynor's Coptic bound book of handmade paper uses glyphs to bridge time. *From Rocks* engages the visual and tactile qualities of cave paintings with sensitively rendered figurative icons printed on richly textured paper.

Traditions and histories are often told through song passed down by word of mouth from singer to singer. The spread of romance languages is partly attributable to the chivalrous tales and lyric poems sung by troubadours; contemporary parents sing medieval nursery rhymes to their children. Songs also recount personal stories, record travels, or tell jokes. Peter Thomas plays with all of those in *Ukulele Accordion*. The ukulele shaped book is accordion bound into the wood body of the instrument. The sheet music pages are complete with musical notation and a singsong rhyme about Hawaii. Watercolor paintings worthy of being on kitschy souvenir postcards embellish the pages.

The art of storytelling is practiced daily in libraries, classrooms, and on the living room couch. Children respond to a well-chosen story and the creative interpretations of the

teller. *The Bear and the Star* is told by Svenja Rau with the bold geometric shapes and large type used in children's storybooks. The letterpress and linocut pages come alive with the tale of a bear that climbs onto a star for a flying adventure through the sky. Children's books are appreciated and collected by adults for the beauty of image and message. Comic books are another book form that has evolved into adult fare, as the graphic novel. Where writers illustrate with words, visual artists can tell stories with no text at all. Koen H. Liem's *A Desert Story* is a graphic novel told through fifty-one block prints. The main character travels through a dense visual landscape. A center folio bursts in a visual cacophony of gas station and fast food signs; the radiating lines and textures of the block prints emphasize the action.

The audience shares an experience through the storytelling event. Armchair travelers experience the events vicariously; world travelers include their friends with countless snapshots. Dorothy Yule shares her travels in *Souvenirs of Great Cities*, illustrated by Susan Hunt Yule. Four accordion books take us to London, San Francisco, New York and Paris. Hand drawn images of must-see sites are printed onto the reverse fold pop-ups, framed by short texts. As with any book, we travel through these pages at our own pace, lingering at the Metropolitan Museum, or peering up at the Eiffel Tower. Steven McCarthy's *An American Wake* began with a trip to Ireland. One hundred and fifty years of family history are paired with anecdotal stories. A genealogical study is intercut with social commentary and exposition of stereotypes. A time-line of Irish-American history is presented across color computer printed pages. The layers of information are elegantly composed with a visual clarity that encourages the reader to absorb every bit.

The rich history of storytelling, book making and art making are intertwined in STORY:TELLING. Storytellers rely on the sound of language, gesture, pacing, and the judicious pause to build to climactic points. All of these narrative devices are evident in imagery and text in the books on display at MCBA. Books by Brad Freeman, Claire Van Vliet, Nancy Leavitt, Louise Neaderland, Robin Price and Bill Drendel are among the many works in the show. STORY:TELLING was juried by Rosemary Furtak, librarian at Walker Art Center, and artists Wilber Schilling and Karen Wirth.